**** Sebago Region Fisheries Newsletter****

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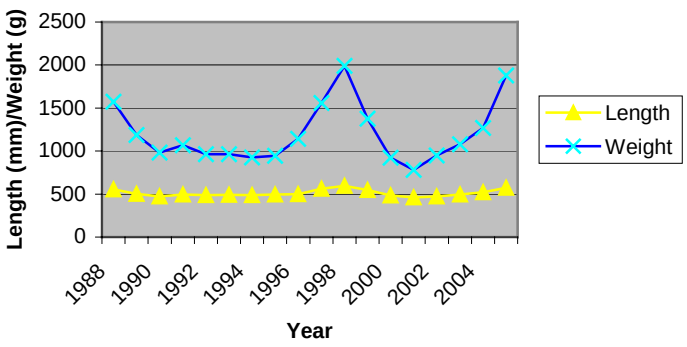
Current and past editions of our newsletter, as well as pictures of fish caught in the region may be viewed on the Department's home page (www.MEFISHWILDLIFE.com)

Sebago Lake Update

Salmon Annual monitoring of adult salmon that enter the Jordan River fish collection facility each November indicates a steady improvement in salmon growth for the fourth consecutive year. For example, three-year old male salmon observed in 2005 were 2 inches longer and 1.3 pounds heavier than observed in 2004 (Figure 1)! Furthermore, 56%

Figure 1. Age 3 Landlocked Atantic Salmon, Jordan River



(20% in 2004) of the run consisted of 3 pound or larger salmon, the largest being 5.8 pounds! The overall condition or plumpness of the salmon is considered excellent. These are some of the largest, fattest salmon seen on Sebago in the last 17 years (photo).

The total size of the salmon run was down considerably from last year. A modest return was anticipated under the reduced salmon-stocking program. However, record-setting amounts of precipitation necessitated large releases at Sebago's outlet, which effectively drew salmon away from the nearby Jordan River. Brood salmon retained at the Casco Hatchery provided the primary source of salmon egg production for 2005.

Lake Trout Indications suggest the togue population has declined and overall size quality is improving. Although a formal angler survey was not conducted in 2005 (next survey planned for 2006 open water fishing season), angler reports from Sebago's "togue fleet" suggest the catch of togue is down, but the fish being caught resemble "footballs". These reports are consistent with the 2005 Windham Rotary Winter Ice Fishing Derby catch, which was down by more than (60%) from 2004. Yet, derby caught lakers averaged 21.5 inches long and 3.39 pounds in 2005, an improvement over 2004. Sporting a mean condition factor of 0.92, these are some of the fattest togue seen in the last 13 years. Good ice last winter in combination with the allowed use of more lines (5 lines allowed as of 2004) effectively increased harvest opportunity.

Smelt For the past four years the MDIFW has partnered with Sebago Lake Anglers Association (SLAA), and Brian Tarbox of the Southern Maine Community College (SMCC) on an experimental sea-run smelt egg transfer project to enhance the recovery of Sebago's smelt population. Just shy of 5 million eggs were collected, disinfected and transported to Sebago. The Department is funding a research project to investigate the contribution made by stocking sea-run smelt eggs. Brian Tarbox of Southern Maine Community College is undertaking this comparative DNA project. The first step of the project will focus on whether there are genetic markers that can be used to differentiate sea-run from landlocked smelt populations with future plans to test various samples of smelt from Sebago to ascertain their origin.

A hydroaccoustic survey of Sebago's smelt population was completed this past September and compared to data collected in 2000, 2001, and 2004. The 2005 results are encouraging and indicate that smelt stocks continue to rebuild.

Future Stocking We are planning to double the landlocked salmon stocking rate (from 1,000 to 2,000) in 2006, based on documented improvements in the smelt population, the growth rates observed for stocked salmon,

and improvements in the size and condition of wild lake trout. The lake is currently capable of supporting the proposed increase in salmon stocking. Ongoing monitoring programs will provide information to assess future salmon stocking rates. It is our expectation that the lake may not support historical levels of salmon stocking, but efforts will be made to maximize stocking opportunities, while balancing the need to maintain good growth rates and produce salmon and lake trout of good size quality.

Northern Pike Following the capture of a single 5 lb northern pike back in June of 2003, only 4 additional northern pike have been captured (and confirmed) on Sebago. The most recent was caught last winter and was a 13 pound ripe female. No successful spawning has yet been documented. We encourage anglers to kill and hold all pike they catch, and to then notify Jim, Brian, or myself at the Gray Headquarters (657-2345).

Thomas Pond

Thomas was the subject of a bass predation study conducted last spring. The purpose of the investigation was to evaluate the fate of stocked spring yearling brook trout in a water supporting a well-established bass population. Shoreline electrofishing surveys were conducted at night within 2 weeks following the stocking of 9 to 11 inch brook trout. The mouth and stomach of captured bass were examined for the presence of brook trout and the bass were returned alive. Undigested/partially digested trout were either visible within the mouth of the bass (photo) or could be detected in the stomach by probing. Bass 15 inches and larger preyed on spring yearling brook trout, but the mean length of predatory bass was 16 inches for smallmouth and 17 inches for largemouths. Although some additional bass digestion rate information must be evaluated to assess the full extent of trout mortality by bass, preliminary findings indicate that bass are a significant predator on stocked spring yearling brook trout in Thomas Pond. We estimated bass consumed 18% of the stocked trout within the first 24 hours following release. Anglers were also surveyed for a six-week period post-stocking and only one angler reported catching a stocked brook trout in Thomas Pond.

The results of this investigation suggest angler returns of stocked spring yearling brook trout may be low on waters where bass of large size quality (> 15") are relatively abundant, particularly where largemouth bass are dominant. We propose to suspend the stocking of spring yearling brook trout in Thomas Pond and possibly some other similar waters with robust bass populations. Instead, larger sized brook trout will be stocked in the fall. Fall yearling trout (12 – 14 inches long) are generally too large to be eaten by all but the largest bass. In addition, bass predation is likely to be significantly lower in the fall due to the colder water temperatures and lowered bass metabolism.

Thompson Lake (Oxford)

Fall trap netting on Thompson was very productive, we caught 55 fish in a single tending and the salmon looked fantastic. These are the largest salmon Thompson Lake has produced since 1997, when we initiated our annual monitoring program for salmon (Table 2). With fall salmon averaging 20.5 inches and 3.4 pounds, we anticipate excellent fishing next spring!

Table 2. Mean Length, Weight, Condition, and LLS/Net Hr for Landlocked Salmon Netted at Thompson Lake, 2000-2005.

Mean	Year					
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Length (in)	18.6	18.7	20.4	19.0	19.6	20.5
Weight (lbs)	2.2	2.6	3.3	2.6	2.9	3.4
Condition (K)	0.91	1.08	1.06	1.04	1.04	1.06
LLS/Net Hr	0.18	0.27	0.43	0.31	0.57	0.77

Pleasant Lake (Casco)

Fall netting on Pleasant Lake produced good numbers of salmon in good condition. Netted adult salmon averaged 18.5 inches long and weighed 2.3 pounds, the largest measured 22 inches long and weighed 3.9 pounds. However, considerable size variation was observed within each age class, which suggests forage may not be optimal for the current level of stocking. Pleasant Pond is providing good angling for moderate sized salmon, and anglers report occasional fish of larger size.

An illegal introduction of landlocked alewives discovered last year will compete with smelt, salmon's preferred forage, and further complicate management of this water. In addition, alewives may dropdown and establish populations in other waters, most notably Sebago Lake.

Auburn Lake (Auburn)

Basin Pond Outlet Stream was sampled again this past fall to monitor the adult landlocked salmon from Auburn Lake that enter the inlet to spawn. Twenty-eight salmon were collected, and once again these salmon were in exceptional condition. The largest fish sampled was a 6.3 pounder, but we lost a couple of beauties that likely exceeded 7 pounds! Table 3 provides a summary of the recent sampling data, and for the 5th

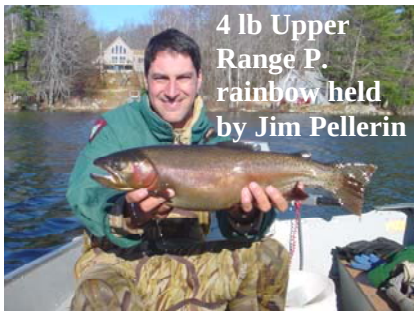
consecutive year Lake Auburn continues to be a top producer for trophy-size landlocked Atlantic salmon.

Table 3. Mean Length, Weight, and Condition of Adult Landlocked Salmon Netted at Basin Pond Outlet Stream.

Mean	Year				
	1999	2002	2003	2004	2005
Length (in)	20.3	21.1	21.7	20.4	20.2
Weight (lbs)	3.1	3.5	3.8	3.5	3.3
Condition (K)	0.98	1.03	1.00	1.08	1.06

Proposed New Rainbow Trout Stockings

The experimental phase of the rainbow trout stocking program is coming to an end, and the fate of the program will be a focus of Department review. Preliminary study results are encouraging and we are initially proposing a modest stocking increase in southern Maine. Experimental stockings statewide currently utilize about 10,000 rainbows annually. About 25,000 will be available in 2007. Many, but not all of the experimental waters will continue to be stocked with rainbows. In addition, Region A staff is proposing to stock six additional waters with rainbows including: Stanley P (Hiram), Bradley P (Lovell), Norway L (Norway), North P (Buckfield), Little Ossipee L (Waterboro), and Forest P (Canton). In recent years, these waters have failed to produce attractive salmonid fisheries using other coldwater species including landlocked salmon, brook trout, brown trout, and/or splake. The stocking of rainbows in these waters will likely lead to a change in stocking programs for the other coldwater species currently being stocked, which may include a reduction in numbers, stocking of different age classes (i.e. changing from SY BKT to FY BKT), and/or cancellation. These proposals will go through an internal and public review process before any management and stocking changes are finalized. We encourage our readers to contact us with any feedback, positive or negative, on the proposed rainbow stockings.



4 lb Upper Range P. rainbow held by Jim Pellerin

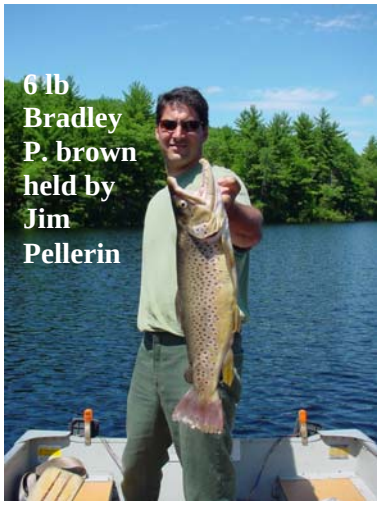
Keoka Lake (Waterford)

Last winter we discussed the history of fishery management on Keoka Lake, and the collapse of the smelt and brook trout fisheries following an illegal stocking of white perch and largemouth bass. Largemouth bass and white perch are strong competitors with brook trout, and largemouth bass are also voracious predators on brook trout.

Last year, we proposed to suspend the stocking of spring yearling brook trout and stock larger size fall yearling salmon, which should better withstand competition and predation pressures than either spring yearling brook trout or salmon. Brook trout would continue to be stocked, but in the fall at a much larger size. The proposed stocking changes have since been reviewed by other Department biologists, as required under our policies, and the proposal has been accepted. In addition, we did not receive any opposition from the public regarding the proposal. Since our hatchery fish are requested 2 years in advance of when they are needed, we have scheduled fish to be available in 2007. The availability of some unscheduled brood brook trout will allow for some unplanned stocking in the fall of 2005 (see "Brood Stocking" below).

Summer Netting on Brown Trout Lakes & Ponds

Seven brown trout waters were sampled last summer including: Burnt Meadow P (Brownfield), Clay P (Fryeburg), Bickford P (Porter), Bradley P (Lovell), No Name P (Lewiston), Ell P (Sanford), and Deer P (Hollis). Our objective was to assess brown trout survival and size quality as part of an ongoing effort to identify waters where brown trout are not meeting performance standards identified in the statewide brown trout plan. It is noteworthy to mention that all of the waters sampled produced older, quality-sized brown trout in the 3 to 6 pound class. On the other hand, younger aged brown trout appeared to be absent or not well represented in the fishery, which suggests a potential survival issue.



6 lb Bradley P. brown held by Jim Pellerin

Public Access

Bob Williams

Bob Williams, MDIFW's Federal Aid Coordinator and Public Access "guru", unexpectedly passed away last May. He was a strong advocate for public access to public waters for Maine's anglers, and his passing was a major set back to our public access acquisition and development program. He will be greatly missed by his family, friends, and co-workers.

The Department has been diligently pursuing a replacement for Bob's position. Interviews were conducted in late November, and we hope to fill the vacancy soon.

Otter Ponds…..New Public Access Rules

The Portland Water District (PWD) owns most of the lands surrounding the Otter Ponds in Standish. Otter Ponds #2 and #4 are locally popular winter brook trout fishing destinations. Access to the waters is allowed by the PWD during daytime hours, but only by foot or by snowmobile (no vehicles or ATVs). A new permitting program went into effect this past summer. A daily permit is required any time you are on PWD Land (excluding the Mountain Division Trail). Permits may be obtained at several kiosks located at the following access points:

Johnson Field is the ball field on the right just outside of the Village on Route 35. There is a gated gravel road here that leads to the YMCA Camp. There is a permit kiosk at Johnson Field and a second one when you reach the ponds.

The railroad overpass on Route 35. There is room for probably half a dozen vehicles to park and a kiosk is located after the first two ponds.

Route 237 kiosk is located a half-mile up from the Route 35/Route 237 intersection. Follow the "Skip Road" for about half a mile and then turn left on an unnamed trail, which leads to the Ponds.

The Mountain Division Trail from Gorham
The Mountain Division Trail follows the railroad tracks from Windham to Standish. The trail crosses Route 237 in Gorham. From that point you can walk to Otter Ponds and you'll reach the permit kiosk at the point where the trail and tracks come up to the first Otter Pond.

New Signage Available
Region A staff has developed a new access sign for privately owned, traditional access sites. Most anglers, and other members of the public do not realize that 92% of the available access sites on ponds/lakes 10 acres or larger in southern Maine are not owned or controlled by the state. There is a heavy reliance on landowners to support traditional access opportunities to public waters and their fishery resources. The new signs are intended to: (1) direct public use to specific areas on private lands, (2) acknowledge that traditional access is occurring on privately owned land, and (3) encourage behavior respectful of the landowner.

Pond Reclamation Update
Mosquito Pond (Albany) was treated with rotenone in the fall of 2002 to remove competing fish, predominantly consisting of chain pickerel. This 5-acre pond was initially stocked with 6-inch brook trout in the fall of 2003 and is closed to winter angling. Special open water regulations were adopted to enhance the development of a quality fishery in this very small pond (fly fishing only, with a 2 fish daily bag, minimum length 10 inches, only 1 over 12). Last Spring anglers reported catching brookies up to 14 inches long. A summer netting operation produced good numbers of trout averaging 10.5 inches long and about a ½ pound. The fish were in very good condition. Our management on this very small pond will focus on producing 9 to 11 inch brook trout with an occasional fish between 12 and 14 inches.

We recently filed a very comprehensive license application with the Department of Environmental Protection in support of our proposed reclamation of Speck Pond (Norway). It has taken over a year to prepare the application and we are hopeful that a permit will be approved by the spring of 2006, allowing for a treatment later that summer. The pond would likely be restocked with brook trout in the fall of 2007.

Brood Fish Stocking
Approximately 600 retired brood brook trout (+/- 3 lbs), 250 landlocked salmon (+/- 3 lbs), and 300 brown trout (+/- 6 lbs) were stocked this past fall in southern Maine lakes and rivers. Check out the Department's web site for a complete listing (www.mefishwildlife.com).

Proposed Statewide Changes to Recreational and Commercial Smelt Management
In last winter's edition we discussed a number of new statewide smelt proposals being considered by the Department, which are intended to improve the conservation of the State's smelt resources. Below is a list of the most significant measures that were enacted by the legislature, and are scheduled to be in effect for 2006.

- A 24-inch maximum hoop size for dip-nets was established, when used in or within 100 feet of stream. Larger sized dip nets can still be used in lakes.
- Hook & Line anglers & dip-netters (without a commercial license) will only be allowed to keep 5-dozen smelt alive; the balance of their limit would have to be killed.
- A statewide 2 AM closure for dip netting.
- Smelt dealers are required to use commercially manufactured graders, which has been more thoroughly defined.
- Commercial anglers will be required to report smelt catch information to MDIFW.
- Smelt dealers are allowed to dip only 2 quarts of smelt during the spring spawning season.

Region A's Noteworthy Fish List Below is a list of just a few trophy fish caught in Region A waters during the past year.

Angler's Name	Weight & Fish	Location
Tom Anderson	9.0 lb Brown Trout	Square P
Paul Stone	4.5 lb Chain Pickerel	Panther P
Brian McIntyre	6.0 lb Largemouth Bass	Panther P
Roger Bacon	5.1 lb Landlocked Salmon	Sebago L
Willy Wilkins	4.5 lb Lake Whitefish	Sebago L
Peter Windrush	8.5 lb Brown Trout	NA